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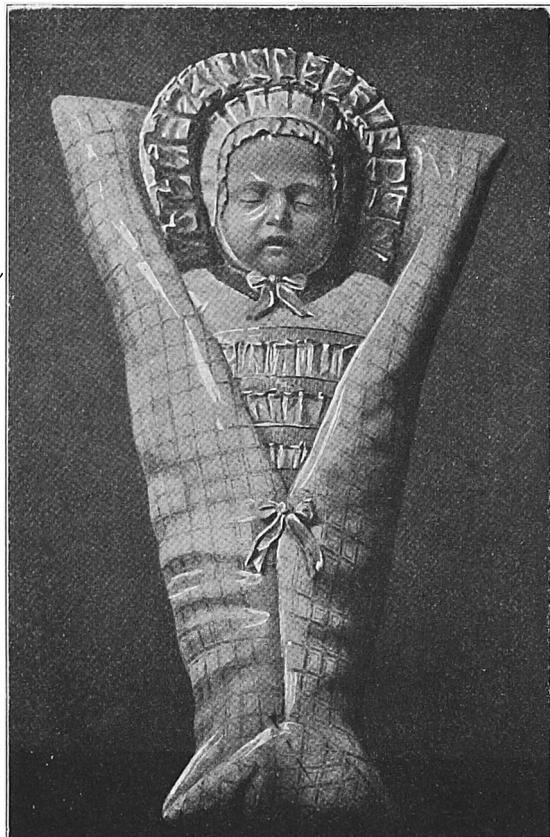
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DRESS

It would be almost impossible to bestow sufficient praise on the get-up of Mr. Brockhaus's sumptuous volume, which is published at the comparatively low figure of 160 marks (£8). The illustrations are a triumph of the reproducers' art. There are not less than 219 illustrations with the text, besides numerous magnificent chromolithographic plates and photogravure plates, some of which are printed in two colours by a special process. The publisher and author have been fortunate enough to secure the co-operation



*INFANT IN SWADDLING CLOTHES
IN PAINTED DRESDEN CHINA*

DRESS

'My love in her attire doth shew her wit.'

THE dress that is in the best taste to-day, at any rate for those whose life is passed in cities, is one that avoids the current follies and ugliness of fashion without making its wearer conspicuous. This is an ideal by no means easy of attainment.

Mrs. Godfrey Blount came close to it in three costumes made from her designs by the Peasant Arts Society, and exhibited at the General Meeting of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union. Two, at any rate, of these dresses were rational every-day garments for street wear ; at the same time, they were sufficiently ordinary to pass without comment even from that inexorable critic of unfashionable womanhood, the feminine East-ender. An unusual elegance was given, and the great artistic fault of

the blouse and skirt, which is the hard division of the figure at the waist, was corrected—as it may always be corrected—by ever so slight a continuation of the skirt on the upper part of the body.

In one case Mrs. Blount had a pinafore-bodice with shoulder-straps (the latter, by the way, should be curved to fit round the top of the arm, and not straight, as Mrs. Blount had them) ; in the other, a wide belt and braces. Both devices give an effect of completeness, quite absent from a skirt stopping short at the waist, without the wearer being conscious of anything worn over the blouse.

None of the speakers at the meeting gave vent to any particularly enlightened ideas on the subject of dress. Some pinned their faith

DIDO AND ÆNEAS

to the absence of artificial pressure, some to woollen underclothing, but no fresh light was thrown upon conclusions long ago arrived at by sensible people. The final word on dress reform came from the lips of a mere male. Reform in dress, as in every matter of life into which art enters, that is to say, in all, must come from within, and not from outside. The adoption of no particular form of dress (with all due respect to the Rational Dress Association), no appeals on behalf of the claims of health and comfort, the influence of no particular body or organisation, however powerful, will effect reform under present social conditions. When we lead healthy, natural lives, dress will reform itself; beauty can have no higher interpretation than that given it by William Morris—the fit and the seemly.

* * * *

One seldom has so good an opportunity of judging stage dress as was afforded by the excellent pro-scenic arrangements adopted by Mr. Gordon Craig at the Purcell Operatic Society's performances of '*Dido and Æneas*', given at the Hampstead Conservatoire on May 17th, 18th, and 19th. The peculiar advantage of these arrangements was that the proscenium was brought very low, making the stage opening of an oblong shape; the sides and top of the opening were masked in with perfectly plain surfaces of a warmish, but quite neutral grey, while the curtains were of the same colour. The effect was to throw up and focus the stage picture to the fullest extent, so that every bit of colour held its due value.

Scenery, dresses, properties, programmes, in fact all the arrangements of the opera which come within the scope of this article, were from designs by Mr. Edward Gordon Craig, and it certainly was a great undertaking, not only on account of the labour involved by so large a field, but principally on account of the bold attitude towards stage productions assumed, and the attempts at stage reform which were apparent; and for this attitude Mr. Craig deserves great credit. The lighting, for instance, was excellent; two powerful lights were used from the back of the hall, over the heads of the audience; these were supplemented by head-lights, but side-lights and foot-lights were absent, and the dresses and

their wearers gained immensely by this innovation. Further, there was a distinct artistic intention in the inseparableness of the dresses from their surroundings; they were essentially part of the design of each scene, and this gave a harmonious completeness which is rare on the stage; managers are apt to forget that a number of isolated dresses, however beautiful, do not make a beautiful picture.

The colouring, particularly in the first act, is more fashionable than beautiful; it is extremely crude and heavy. There we have a vivid grass green, a deep purple, and a dead Reckitt's blue background, while Dido's throne is embellished by light scarlet cushions; the effect is that of a collection of strong aniline dyes. It is not, of course, the milliners' fashion that Mr. Craig has followed, but that of the New English Art Club. Such crude colour and deliberate discords are to be seen everywhere to-day in the work of a certain school of Artists. In the last act, Mr. Craig modifies the whole scheme into one of extreme beauty, by throwing a yellowish light upon it. Under the play of this light the background becomes a deep shimmering blue, apparently almost translucent, upon which the green and purple make a harmony of great richness, while Dido's scarlet cushions are mercifully allowed to give place to black.

In the programme of '*Dido and Æneas*' Mr. Craig says that he has 'taken particular care to be entirely incorrect in all matters of detail.' This statement will hardly protect him from criticism; it is the sort of thing that may occasionally be said gracefully, but which in print is simply fatuous. There is no earthly reason why Mr. Craig should be correct to detail, even supposing him to be in possession of detail to which to be correct. It is therefore not from the point of view of correctness that I venture to criticise these dresses, but from the far more important one of effect.

Dido's dress was not particularly satisfactory. It was a long, loose green robe, hanging from a yoke of purple satin, with long gauze sleeves. It had too much the look of a modern tea-gown, the sleeves particularly gave a touch of frivolity which destroyed anything royal or imposing in the dress: it certainly did not do justice to the rare queenly presence, or the splendid figure,

THE PARIS EXHIBITION

of the beautiful red-haired woman who impersonated Dido. The dresses of Dido's maidens were good in idea, but badly carried out. The robes were of an appalling green, to cover which they were swathed in deep purple gauze veils, an attempt to combine drapery and veiling, the effect of which was simply that of rags. The robes should have been of a green that it is possible to look at with the naked eye and the purple cloaks should have been of a woollen material, so that the beauty and dignity of simple drapery might have been attained ; veils could also have been worn if necessary. In the second act grey veils were substituted for the purple ; these gave a very good colour effect against a really beautiful landscape back-cloth in low tones of grey and green, the whole being strengthened by dark grey cloaks worn by the men.

Æneas's dress was fine in itself, but too dark in colour. The heaviness of colour in Dido's dress and surroundings had a certain symbolic meaning, heightening the effect of the music and the action ; to carry this on Æneas should have been a bright spot in the design, instead of being clad in purple and black. Mr. Craig shows that his intention was to convey some such symbolic effect, for Æneas attendants carry hideous red and gilt cornucopias, such as one is familiar with in pantomime ballets. Now the symbolism of the cornucopia, together with that of the olive-

branch, the anchor, and other kindred forms is so played out, that the objects have no more poetical suggestion than their written names, and produce no effect but that of cheapness.

Another descent to the ridiculous occurs in a certain scene where Dido's maidens appear wound about with purple paper roses. Why Mr. Craig should have permitted this piece of theatrical commonplace it is difficult to imagine ; the paper roses are quite unsuggestive, they are not wanted for colour, and they by no means add grace to the form.

The witches' clothing can hardly be described, a seething mass of black forms was all that could be seen, owing to the too great darkness of the stage. Here and there a horrible mask, or a corpse-like face caught the eye with telling effect. These masks are the most appallingly gruesome things ; they are a nightmare, the embodiment of horrid emotions. The witches' scenes were completely satisfactory, and of others that were not, there is always this to be said—such an excellent failure is far more interesting than a commonplace success. The general level of Mr. Craig's production is far above the average, and it will be the greatest pity if further performances are not given in London, so that a larger audience may see it than was possible at Hampstead.

MABEL COX.

A RCHITECTURE AND EXTERIOR DECORATION AT THE PARIS EXHIBITION, 1900, BY W. FRED

THE route to Paris led me via Strasburg, in Elsace, famous for its Gothic, buildings, which recall the most precious words ever said about architectural art : Göethe's words on the Strasburg Cathedral. Göethe had entered that town with the unclear ideas about the essence of Gothic Art, which are the result of generalising, and therefore mistaken, school views. All was Gothic to him, that showed sure signs of being 'out of time,' overloaded and incongruous. In sight of this great, real, Gothic monument by E. v. Steinbach he could recognise that the greatness of every style is its purity ; that 'beautiful' is a superficial judgment, that he who wishes to know, has to search for the funda-

mental forms of each style, before he can pronounce the slightest general judgment.

Under the influence of this change of ideas, and filled with an unexpected feeling of admiration, Göethe arrived at those views on architecture, which he afterwards expressed in these words : 'They want to make you believe that the fine Arts originated from our supposed inclination to beautify the things around us. That is not true. . . Art is formative long before it is beautiful, and yet it is true, great Art, yea, sometimes truer and greater than beautiful Art. For man is endowed with a formative nature which becomes active as soon as his existence is secured. . . Thus the savage